EST. 1982
THE RUTGERS REVIEW

roots
culture - vulture
the boge life beckons

¡dale!
sour fruit

volume 55 - issue II

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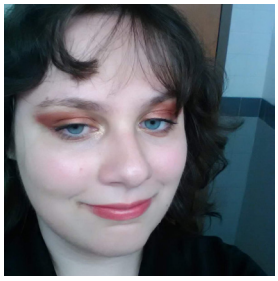
Ava Rooney (Class of 2019) has a major in Communications and minor in Psychology. Her favorite class at Rutgers has been Abnormal Psychology. If she were to be given an award, it would be the most likely to lose someone else's Juul. Her favorite food is any and all types of noodles. Her favorite ice cream flavor would either have to be chocolate chip cookie dough or salted caramel. Her favorite age was 3 years old because she was living her best life. When she was in high school she was the captain of her gymnastics team. Nowadays you can find her involved in her favorite past time, practicing yoga at home.

Ben Brizuela (Class of 2019), also known as "Benji" to a select few, is a Journalism and Media Studies major with a minor in Art History. If he could be any food or beverage, he would be Pineapple Fanta because he likes to pop-off occasionally. In addition, Ben is an avid dancer who can milly-rock very well. His breakdance top-rock is pretty fire and his leaps are also clean as fuck so you probably shouldn't challenge him to a dance battle. If Ben could give himself an award, it would the "Non-Stereotypical Filipino" Award because most Filipino-American kids want to be nurses and doctors, but that shit is not for him. His favorite ice-cream flavor is nonexistent because he prefers ice-cream sandwiches. Lastly, his favorite age was 20 because that's when he realized that he didn't have to care about what people thought about him, he just had to worry about the people close to him and what made him happy.



Jacqueline Goldblatt (Class of 2021) is a Journalism and Media Studies major with a hopeful minor in Comparative Literature. When asked about her favorite class, she says that being a participant in the University Choir is her favorite because it is sort of a half class and half club. She loves to play guitar and write songs. Thus, she is very happy to be the Social Chair of the Rutgers University Choir. She is also a huge comic, video game, and anime nerd. If she was a food, she would be squid ink pasta because she writes so much that ink practically flows out of her. Plus, her pens tend to explode. To her, the best feeling in the world is when something she has worked hard on has turned out well. Her favorite thing ever is the rush of joy and pride you get after you have accomplished something. If she could give herself an award, it would be a medal for resilience. Even when she has felt close to drowning, she has managed to keep herself above water using hope as a sort of lifevest.

letter from the editor

This semester, and in some ways this year, has been strange for me. My life has become more artistically stagnant than usual, and I've been more even-keeled than ever. In some ways this has left me feeling trapped in myself, in the usual, in habit.

During a recent trip to London to visit my best friend, he reminded me of *Waking Life's* idea of the holy moment. In my more volatile past, holy moments would come, seemingly from nowhere, to burst through my everyday life. I became so accustomed to their presence that, on some days, I could practically conjure them up with just a step or two in the right direction.

Through talking with my friend, I realized that the holy moments I could remember from recent times had come from large events, rather than everyday happenstance. I saw that what I had lost was the glory in the normal, in my habit. As of late, I have been trying to regain this past wonder for my habit, to consecrate it once again.

It seems that this act of grappling with habit has captured much more of our magazine staff than just me. In this issue, we have set out to investigate habit in a variety of ways, ranging from addictions to hobbies, and the magazine you hold in front of you is the result.

We hope you enjoy.

Adam Yawdoszyn
Editor-in-Chief

culture

walking the plank

by brielle diskin

Peter Pan is the boy who never wanted to grow up. He lived on an island called Neverland with the Lost Boys. An island where imagination could let you fly, fairies could solve your problems with a sprinkle of pixie dust, and children only had to be—could only be—children. All while the real world was off in a distant unforseeable future.

Right now, I identify with Peter Pan more than I did as a kid. I'm graduating college and all I want to do is leap out the window and fly to Neverland, fueled by exuberant naivety and deafening fear. But there is no Neverland, there's only here. Here is both the present and the future, equally terrifying and slightly exciting.

When I started college almost four years ago everything was ahead of me. Now, everything is behind me. I am not sure how to feel about it. There are of course so many things I wish I could redo, things I wish I didn't do, and things I wish I did do. But every mistake (and trust me there were enough for a lifetime) served a greater purpose.

It was hard—like really hard. The structure of college itself borders on inhumane. We overcon-

sume credits, gorge ourselves with information only to regurgitate it and then probably forget it. Unless you're an extreme introvert you can't avoid the temptations of a social life. And a social life in college—in my experience—was surrounded by drugs and alcohol. And somewhere in there I have to chase my dreams and build a career. There was little room for weakness and fear.

Each year at school was its own thing. In freshman year, I was clueless. I wasn't sure who I wanted to be. I partied too much, fell in with the wrong people, and got an embarrassing GPA. Surprisingly, I came out more confident. Overconfidence carried into a disastrous sophomore year with mental breakdowns, bad boyfriends, and harrowing roommate drama. It forced me to look within myself and focus on what I was doing here. I found myself more as a writer. Junior year was recovery, I joined the Rutgers Review, and I spent the spring abroad in Italy. I saved myself and found myself. Senior year has been in my favorite year of college. I know what it means to be myself and I surrounded myself with people who love me for that.

A duality of the mind occurs as I walk around campus, especially this last semester. Sometimes I feel this immense sense of pride, like I'm a veteran doing a victory lap. My senior strut. Other times a haunting nostalgia enraptures my mind. An involuntary walk down memory lane riddled with regret and overrun by ghosts. A lot has happened here. Not all of it bad, not all of it good, but undoubtedly difficult.

I am afraid to leave. I'm scared of the future. After graduation I am moving home, I have to start paying off my student debt, and I currently do not have a job lined up. Plenty to be stressed about.

For Peter Pan, the world was filled with faith, trust, and pixie dust. For me, it's filled with faith, trust, and pixelated dust vacuums of job portals where I am just one applicant adrift in a faceless sea. I am relinquishing the fall back plan because if you have a fall back plan you're going to fall back. I'm ignoring the adult lectures about finding a stable job in business or marketing. I will be a writer. I will move out of home ASAP to go live in a crappy New York apartment. Because it will be my crappy apartment. I'll have frozen dinners and way too much pasta but it will be all mine. A full-time job won't scare me and bills will get paid. I will find new friends and keep the old. I will not cower in the face of fear.

"We are always stronger than we think we are. I want this to be something that's exciting. I have dreams and now I have no excuse but to chase after them."

We are always stronger than we think we are. I want this to be something that's exciting. I have dreams and now I have no excuse but to chase after them.

There will be a great feeling of loss. I already feel it now. I love college. I love having pockets of "free" time in the day. The huge community. The kind of accountability that doesn't ecompass the full weight of responsibility. I will miss sitting with friends in the library and being within walking distance of everything and everyone. There's good stuff here.

Peter Pan seemed brave, but he wasn't. He was terrified to look maturity in the eye, of walking the plank. I've never been good at transitions but I am reminding myself that it's okay to be scared. In fact it's a good thing because it means your life is about to change.

more than a club

by caelan sujet

Barcelona has always been a part of my life. It's hard for me to admit that when I was younger I wore the merengues colors (Real Madrid), but it happened, it's a part of my past, and thankfully I got over my share of youth rebellion. Roughly 12 years ago I buried that jersey somewhere I'd never find it, and since then my life has been covered in blue and red stripes.

My dad, my dad, my dad. Most kids think their dad is the strongest person in the world, but after a while they figure out their dad's just a normal human. I never had that revelation and I don't think I ever will. He's been through an incredible amount of garbage in his life and he's still standing. When he decides he needs to move a 900 pound airplane engine, he shrugs his shoulders, puts his head down, and moves it. He's the strong silent type: the type of person to see that it's raining and decide that this would be the best time to go out and chop wood with an ax. So when I saw my dad start crying after Barcelona secured the treble (winning all 3 major trophies in one year), after they gracefully buried Manchester United in that beautiful 2009 UEFA Champions League Final, I knew that this was a special kind of love. A love different from the love he has for my mother. The kind of love that takes years to learn and understand.

He would preach to me about Barcelona's slogan, 'Més que un club' (more than a club). He'd tell me that the club was a family and that players get recruited from around the world from a young age and live in La Masia. They stay there for their whole lives, receiving

an education, training, eating, and working to make the first team. He'd tell me that the club took care of their players and that they played not just for themselves, but for the people of Catalonia. He'd say all of this with his head lifted upward and chest pushed forward. I could listen to him talk about them for hours, not because I shared his passion for the team, but because his words danced and I knew I was learning.

At that point in my life I knew very little but my dad taught me all of the important things. Without countless lectures, I might not have known that Barack Obama had just become president. But I knew for a fact that Messi was my hero, that Puyol was my savior, that Xavi was my first love, that Iniesta was my role model, and that I, Caelan Sujet, was going to play for Barcelona. Of course, life has its twists and turns and unexpected speed bumps, so the last part didn't go as planned, but it was worth a shot.

After coming to college, where I got to watch what I wanted and my dad no longer changed my mom's cooking shows, turned off my sister's my little pony, and shut down some incredible TV shows like Beyblade and Yu-Gi-Oh that my brother and I adored, I stopped watched soccer. I continued to play Fifa and occasionally checked in on the new cleats that came out. But between my bum knee and TV freedom I was more detached from the soccer world than I had ever been.

"I could listen to him talk about them for hours, not because I shared his passion for the team, but because his words danced and I knew I was learning."

Last year my dad took me to Barca City, a local New Brunswick Spanish-inspired tapas restaurant, after he felt the need to get back in touch with his inner Spanish (he isn't Spanish at all, he just loves the country). The Barcelona crest was everywhere I looked, signed soccer balls sitting on shelves, all the TV's playing the soccer games (rather than the expected basketball or football), something I wasn't used to. Of course, like any bar in close proximity to a college campus, it's a common sight to see it lit up deep into the night, hosting a lovely array of stumbling, stuttering students. But to me, that place reminded me just how much I missed soccer and everything that it brought to my life. It reminded me that I missed eating chips on the couch with my family surrounding me, yelling at pixels that didn't care what I had to say.

So today, when my dad trekked down to New Brunswick and we walked into Barca City, prepared to watch El Classico, I was thankful for everything Barcelona has given me. When the final whistle blew, and Rakitic's early Barcelona goal stood as the 1-0 decider, the place exploded in the best way possible. Frustrated fans dropped their heads and cursed at the TV, Barca fans spilled beer, chanted, and danced. But when fluttering emotions started to settle I found myself standing next to my beaming father, shaking hands with people who spoke different languages, separated by decades of time, and who all shared that same unfiltered love. People who knew and felt what I did: that Barcelona is 'Més que un club'.

growing up with immigrant parents

by benjamin brizuela

My parents are both from the Philippines. My mother is from Iloilo, Philippines and my father is from Bicol, Philippines. I was raised as a Filipino-American and this filled my life with positivity.

Before they met each other, my mother and father received college degrees and went to live and work in Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was a place that had an abundance of Filipino workers. My mom went off to work in a Saudi hospital and my father worked as an engineer in hospital facilities. My mother dealt with patients and treated them to the best of her abilities. My father fixed elevators and handled a staff of mechanical engineers.

They have dealt with some crazy things in their past (capital punishment is legal in Saudi Arabia). Once, my mother was not wearing a headdress or hijab and was yelled at by police officers. Luckily she had her papers on her and they let her go. My father saw something, on the other hand, that changed him. One day he was walking through the market and he

noticed the streets were empty. He heard a crowd gathering in the distance and walked over to find them surrounding a woman. She was going to be punished because she committed adultery. He saw a man with a sword yelling in Arabic. The woman was knelt down. My father saw the sword swing down with swiftness. The next thing he saw was the woman's head separated from her body. He couldn't eat the rest of the day. That was not the last beheading he saw. It was "normal." I always wonder what went through my father's mind when he saw that sword come down so fast. These are only some examples of huge culture shocks and our humanistic habits of understanding culture. This experience shaped my parents frame of mind as they grew older.

They were set up by their friend and I guess they hit it off because they're married now. They got married in the 80's and decided that it was time for them to either go back to the Philippines or move out to the United States. They decided to move to America and my mother would move out first because she secured a job at Monmouth Medical Hospital as a registered nurse. She found a community of Filipina nurses that were in the same situation as her. She lived with them in an apartment complex. Those women became my aunts and helped raise me. They are my family. Because of that community, we were able to understand our culture and learned to love it. My father came a year after my mother arrived in the U.S. and got a job as a facility manager for a hospital.

My parents had three boys and they treated them with love and respect. They taught us that we need to work for what we want. If we want to experience life, we need to work first and play later. They are the type of parents that are happy as long as you're happy and you can support yourself. I thought they were strict, but then I saw my family friends' parents. Their parents would have homework schedules and curfews. Their parents wanted them to become doctors, nurses, lawyers, and engineers. My parents' minds were in a different space.

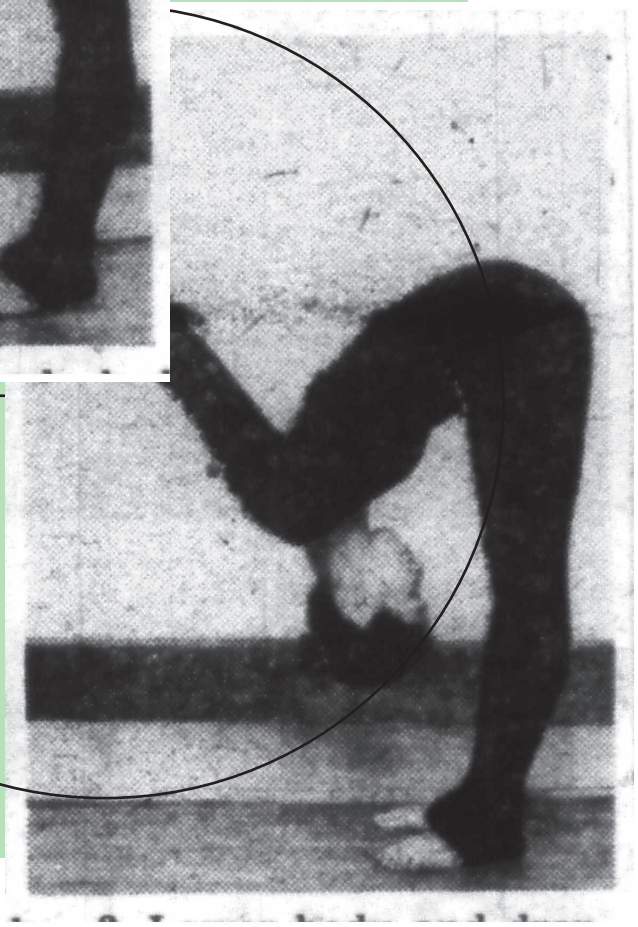
"THEY TAUGHT US THAT WE NEED TO WORK FOR WHAT WE WANT. IF WE WANT TO EXPERIENCE LIFE, WE NEED TO WORK FIRST AND PLAY LATER."

My parents simply didn't want us doing stupid shit. If we got bad grades, we got our asses beat. If we got in trouble in school, we got our asses beat again. But these small taps on the butt taught us not to fuck around and to take some things seriously, such as school. My dad wanted one of his sons to follow in his footsteps and become an engineer, but we didn't want that. My brothers and I each decided on our own that engineering wasn't the right fit for us. None of us went the science route and it disappointed him a little.

My brothers studied business and marketing while I went to study Journalism and Art History. Now us kids understand that he and my mother don't care, as long as we get jobs and succeed.

Their journey to America proved that they worked to be where they are, they worked to survive, they dealt with life as minorities, they struggled, but the joy of being in the United States of America trumped all of this.

It is because of them that I will work in museums. I will do something that will ease their worries about financial problems and making bills payments. I will reach a point in my life where I can support and help them whenever they need it. When I think about their stories and lives before America, it fuels me to work hard, if not harder, than they did to succeed. I will succeed in order to honor my parents.



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culture consumption in medium-sized bites

by cassandra rosario

"We should not have to fight for proper representation in a society that continually excludes us from the narrative."

Ever since I was young, I have felt a profound urgency to seek means of representation. As the years have passed, this inclination has not shifted; I still find myself looking all throughout media for some Latinx representation to momentarily fulfill this constant need. As I continued to examine this media and its cultural impact on our society, I recognized a similar longing amongst other individuals in underrepresented communities. Western models of representation are easily accessible within most media, but we are still in search of proper representation. Western models often lack substance and depth in their portrayals. When we finally hear of some form of media--film or television--centralizing on minority experiences, we cling to them. We show up in large groups in hopes that we can keep these models afloat, and make it our collective motive to uplift them. Thus, we run to theatres or faithfully watch these shows in the hopes to elevate our communities and mainstream our experiences. We want to see ourselves in our favorite characters because others' models have consistently taken them away from us.

Shows like Ugly Betty, Taina, and One Day at a Time are no different. As a child, I remember running around my basement singing along to the theme song. I also recall lounging on my couch as a teen binging Ugly Betty. These images are still vivid in my mind well past their cancellation. I loved seeing another Latina in love with the written word. It made me feel like somehow my aspirations were not too crazy. Again, I found a character whose experiences finally felt palpable and relatable. At the end of the day, these are but minority-based shows scheduled to get the ax.

On the other hand, some of us aren't interested in particular genres or storylines utilized in representation. Still, these individuals endure media they might not enjoy because they want to empower their communities. While empowerment is highly encouraged, individuals shouldn't feel obligated to engage with this one-dimensional media. To this day, we are still fighting the notion our culture can only succeed with such restrictive Western models. We should not have to fight for proper representation in a society that continually excludes us from the narrative.

Although I do not have naive hopes that matters of representation can become better over night, I write this with the intention of opening audiences' eyes. This is issue is more complex than the contents of a page entail, but this does not lessen its significance. The point of the matter is that America is facing an issue with media and how it consumes minority culture. We are constantly working to uplift a seemingly unheard community of individuals--people who live all around the country and world--who deserve proper respect and representation like everyone else in majority-based groups. We deserve to see our experiences represented in our favorite characters too.

my diversity in the art world

by benjamin brizuela

art by ike obeng

The art world is a bizarre, yet magnificent, place.

I was able to experience it first-hand as an archival intern at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York. I was given the opportunity to work closely with the gallery staff and learned how to use databases. A database system serves as the blueprint of the gallery, detailing condition reports about objects in their collections. But as I started to suss out artworld, I realized there weren't many people of color in the gallery. I was this brown-skinned kid from Rutgers University that majored in Journalism. Why was I here?

The first day of work, the registrar woman asked me if I was the "IT guy". I remembered raising my eyebrows in confusion, responding calmly that that I was the new intern. My first thought in my head was, "It's because of the color of my skin." Her comment left me heated and infuriated me to no end. Almost immediately I felt lost and uncomfortable in this environment; they made it apparent nearly from day one that I didn't fit in. After working with me for some time, the staff recognized and admired me for who I was: the energetic college kid who wanted to gain insight into gallery work.

The longer I worked in this gallery, the more I felt ready to take on experience in the museum world. I began looking for research programs that would equip me with curating skills while showing me how a museum operates. One day, I received an email from the Rutgers Art History Department about Andrew W. Mellon Summer Curatorial Academy. This week-long program was primarily aimed at historically underrepresented groups in the curatorial field. I thought, "Why not apply? I'm qualified, aren't I?" The months of waiting for a response killed me. Finally, I received an email from the organizer that said I was accepted. The first words I saw were "Congratulations!" and I felt something. I felt that this could be my in, that I could try and diversify the art world.

The program started on June 17 and ended June 24. It may have only been a week, but I learned a massive amount of information from the staff as well as other participants. It was a diverse group that consisted of people with Asian, Black, Hispanic, and South Asian backgrounds. At this point, I knew I wanted a job in the art world. My skin color shouldn't stop me but rather empower me. Diversity is what makes you an individual. Diversity gives you an identity. I come from a Filipino-American family. My parents are from the Philippines and they worked hard to get to where they are now. They went from getting their college degree to living and working in Saudi Arabia. They got married and moved to the United States, and thanks to them I was born here. I could have gone the stereotypical route of a Filipino-American and get a degree in nursing or medicine, but that's not for me. I want to follow my interests, and so I will primarily work in collections management.

Shout-out to my parents, Teresita and Adonis. Because of them, I'm able to pursue a career in the, often exclusive, art world.

between our world and art world

by izilda jorge
art by lauren krasnoff

When you hear 'Warhol', you expect words like 'soup-can' and 'painting' to be thrown around. 'Star-fucker' was the last thing I'd expect the Zimmerli Art Museum Director to say. As the former Andy Warhol Museum Director (1996-2010), it's not outlandish to suppose Thomas Sokolowski would know a bit about Warhol. Though, our conversation wasn't so much about Warhol as it was about the gap between active participants of artworld and the average person.

Artworld is just what it sounds like: the social climate of the art scene as determined by leading 'experts' in the field. 'Experts' usually take form in scholars, directors, other elite persons. While artworld can enrich the significance of an art-object through theory and historical context, it does further alienate the common viewer from an art space. This isn't some anti-intellectual blanket statement to oppose artworld and its teachings. Whether or not this alienation is deliberate is still up for debate, but the fact remains that art spaces (museums, galleries) are enjoyed by a specific demographic of people. And this targeted demographic holds very little overlap with the average American. For the same rea-

sons the common man is turned off by these art spaces, they are also disengaged with art itself. Sokolowski talked of how Warhol himself was from an immigrant household, raised by Slovakians who came to the States in the 1920s. Warhol didn't grow up in an environment that spoke of artworld or even alluded to it. Like most with immigrant parents can attest to, culture from the home country dominates the household. Because most immigrants leave their country from strife and other hardships, the life they lead in the U.S. reflects the values that ensured survival back home. There just wasn't enough time to indulge in luxuries like art when you had to work in a farm or factory. Yet, Warhol is a clear example that one need not be acquainted with artworld in order to appreciate, or even participate, in art.

With an abundance of snobs and pretentious folk spewing out art theory, we might think art isn't something we're naturally able to connect with. Yet, it's important to remember art is not reserved for artworld participants, be it the faux-intellect, revered scholar, or gallery-owner. While art world may have taken a turn for elitist social circles in recent decades, art is still a uniquely human experience. It's a shared form of expression we can all identify with in the right conditions. It's these conditions that Sokolowski is interested in crafting within museum spaces. He believes art is interdisciplinary at its core: there is no 'right' way to experience art. Nor are there prerequisites to be able to enjoy art simply for art's sake.

He does hold the belief that art is often a multi-dimensional tool. It has roots in social and political dialogue, and can be wielded as a weapon to spearhead radical reform. If utilized to its fullest potentials, museums may also present themselves as a powerhouse for change. Through exhibits dealing with art in response to systemic racism, sexism, classism and the like, museums highlight the struggles of a community and take on a call for action in the process. Sokolowski has implemented similar outreach programs in his previous times with museums. He reminds us that art, and its powers, reside in the people.

death by influence

by brielle diskin

To hold power over, to sway, to impact... to influence. The pervasiveness of influencer culture in the social media age has simultaneously encaptured people's everyday lives and commodified the human existence.

It's demanding our attention, our self worth, and a lot of our money. Today, advertisements seep into every aspect of life; we are "influenced" into doing and buying things we may not have necessarily wanted or needed to do or buy before.

It's the the proverbial line of trust drawn in pixelated sand. And everytime we log onto social media (Instagram in particular), that line is crossed. Social media, more than anything else, has transformed people into human targets. We are poised in the face of advertisement tactics and manipulation.

Yet, influencers themselves become products in that they must 'sell' themselves. Hours spent curating and editing photos, practicing social media marketing tools, expanding their reach, creating content. The hard work that goes into it is often overlooked. I had a friend who was what you would call a microinfluencer. She is a poet and photographer, but essentially she's an advertisement artist rather than the independent she sees herself as. Watching her put in this effort, I admired the tenacity but was weary of the narcissism involved in this line of work.

Influencer culture is ultimately self-interested. People are working incredibly hard to make money off of the masses. It's inevitable that an influencer become narcissistic, their entire life is spent advertising themselves.

"Influencers use the tools of technology to disseminate products and ideology. It prostitutes itself with this false sense of intimacy."

In this age, we begin to feel as if these aesthetic figures are a part of our lives. Influencers use the tools of technology to disseminate products and ideology. It prostitutes itself with this false sense of intimacy. We inherently feel close to them—the figures we 'follow'— and put them on a pedestal. They sell intimacy so they can sell us—the consumers—on products they are paid to promote.

I can go on writing about the dangers as much as I want. I could explain to you how it's all one big scheme of manipulation, but the fact remains: influencer culture isn't going anywhere. It's here to stay whether we like it or not.

Social media influencing preys on our deepest insecurities. That's what the advertising industry has done from the very beginning; propaganda is an age-old practice. And the moment the great persuaders decided to harness this technological modus operandi, we (humans) all involuntarily became slaves to commercialization.

TV anchorman Walter Cronkite is fed a piece of farewell cake by his wife, Betsy, after his last convention.

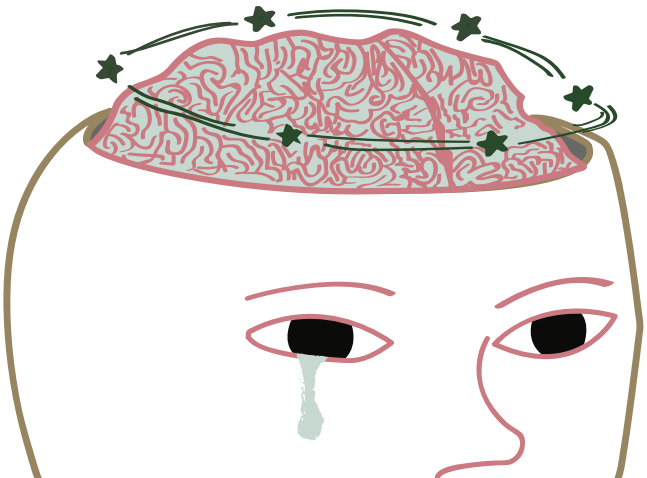
habit

ontological musings

by izilda jorge
illustration by kendall reid

I know you as a string of letters with an idea tacked on afterwards, as if the tail-end of some afterthought. I make the sound and your meaning falls upon the listener, be it in the company of friends or the echo of my room. It cannot be that your essence is tied to this form, that you exist within the conventions of linguistics and symbols. If sound was the end-all be-all to the matter, we couldn't mirror your image across dialect, let alone mere language. When I articulate 'habit' in English, its idea seamlessly finds footing in the throat of the Navajo and German, just as it slips off the hands of the deaf. Sound and speech are but vessels we use to contain you. These alone do not craft your meaning. To believe otherwise is to suggest you're man-made, a product of human experience. It seems a bit short-sighted. To assume your existence is dependent on people is to deny that which exists outside of us.

"Are we the aftermath of nature and her cyclical musings?"



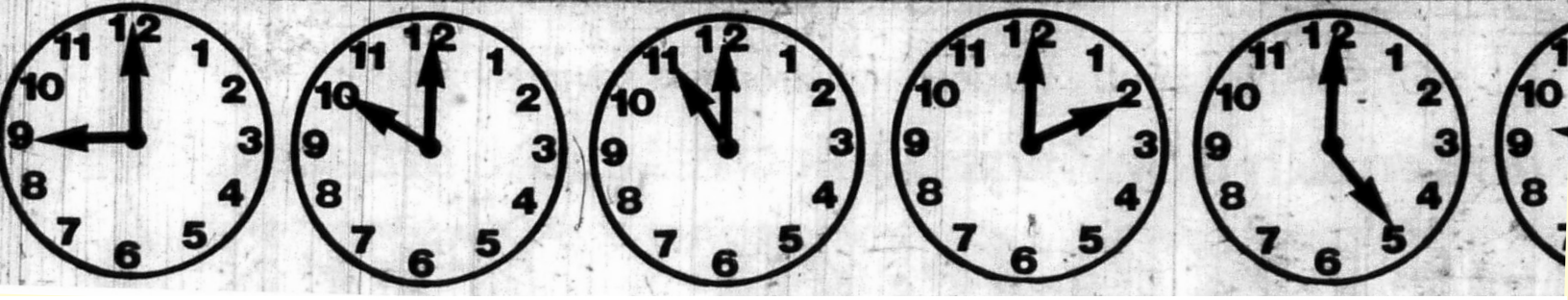
"Are we humans but a symptom of habit?"

Your patterns of repetition manifest in every environment we could ever experience. It is embedded in our river beds. It is the cyclical birth and death of pine needles and oak leaves from our groves and pockets of trees. We humans like to think you're some profound amalgamation, a stand-alone invention unique to the cerebral hemisphere. It seems remarkably 'human' to believe we alone are capable of this agency, to manipulate action enough times to induce desired familiarity and comfort.

We can only recognize when humans create routine, failing to suss out the older rituals of the Earth. Perhaps we turn to you when we are confronted with deep-rooted instability. We seek you out when the arbitrary stimuli become all-consuming, when the threat of succumbing to sensory overload looms over us. Only you can impose order on an otherwise chaotic life.

Are we humans but a symptom of habit? Are we the aftermath of nature and her cyclical musings? Our instinctive rituals, our longing for cycles, as though these bodies aren't undergoing gradual change. It begins at the cellular level, this form of change is but another example of Nature's primordial habit. With the right sorts of repetitions and patterns, we were once sourced directly from her doing.

When we practice habit we are like children imitating the finely-tuned motions of a parent. We are left to replicate her patterns on this small scale of human life. Rehearse it enough times to carve its blueprints in our fingertips, make mere thought synonymous with action. We are the product of habit, fond of echoing this parent and everything she knew.



listening habits:

european home

by esra abdulrahman and zachary kauz

esra

The hardest part of finding new music is definitely just listening to new music. When a song floods your heart with warmth, when you know the lyrics like the back of your hand, and when you have powerful memories linked, it's the musical equivalent of locking your room and burying yourself under the warmth of your blankets.

The safe option was always Dead Boys songs and their forceful riffs, Joe Strummer's throaty vocals, or the funky assortment of Blondie songs across their rich discography. I never ordered anything that wasn't à la carte, and that worked for two years. I didn't need anything to replace the electricity of Young Loud and Snotty, and it still slaps 100%. But after 20 listens, or 1,000, some of the magic is lost. There are only so many times your feet leave the ground listening to that part or hearing that one line.

But what was I going to do, listen to other artists? Other songs? In this economy? If my favorite artists were a warm blanket, the rest of the music ever released was a winter morning that made eyelids weigh 1,000 tons. The cold gets under the covers the way I'd have to listen to something else eventually. The occasional bop on the radio and suggestions from friends are far more merciful than getting out of bed in December, but I'm a creature of habit nonetheless.

zachary

A playlist sits in my library titled "Inner Voice," one of many self-made tracklists on hand to cushion the prospects of tedious work or accompany an extended walk. Fashioned to be a somewhat meditative experience, the arrangement of songs that capture a certain mood is, in one regard, a method of order. The static progression from song-to-song ensures that my focus isn't stolen from additional matters. The playlist is devised to enhance, rather than distract.

Nonetheless, the compulsive cycle of re-listening to the same playlist in distinct contexts allows it to communicate with me differently. Separate songs stand-out and layers within them resonate, be it a lyric or underlying instrumentation. As easy as it is to take music for granted with the power of unlimited streaming, willing confinement to a single playlist forces you to consider new nuances of the individual songs.

As I rotate through different sound systems and states of mind, songs develop alongside my impulses. Sometimes, it's the low fidelity sounds of Mount Eerie that only fully present themselves with the intimacy of over-ear headphones. Other times, it's the subtly driving percussion of Mick Jenkins or Fishdoll propelling me forward while I travel to lord knows where. Regardless, the fixation on a set of songs, be it in playlist or album form, builds my relationship with them and allows me to study their details extensively. Even when my attention wanders away to new music, moments spent with each song and their greater context remain.

healthy body, sick mind

by esra abdulrahman

photo by liam dillon

Drink water. Hit the gym. Do a face mask. Coconut Oil. Boom. Done. You've cured everything from depression to ashiness, or so the Twitter threads say. Self-care is the wave nowadays, and through the feigned positivity and endless posts of glowing skin and proclaimed self-discovery, you too can emerge from the shackles of poor self-esteem and less-than-great mental health! Best results achieved if you use my Morphe code.

Jokes aside, the issue that prevents us from chugging eight glasses of water a day and unlocking our final forms is clearly not skin deep. We know that there is more to do than slather on a face mask and call it a day. Spending hours in bed, disheveled and unmotivated, is the reality, and it's hard to escape these trappings.

I've found that the root of the series of bad habits that prevents me at least from doing what I need to is more than lack of motivation. All I do is, as Allen Ginsberg puts it, "romanticize and decay with indecision." I buy workout memberships, promise myself I'll get a head start on my homework and start drawing again, but the days pass and my posture is just as before and I'm suddenly months behind on school work. When will I light a fire under myself and just go? Just get up and go, I tell myself. 1, 2, 3, okay, start that assignment. Why is that so hard?

Writing this piece revealed some of the answer to me. Dispensing advice to a bunch of friends and talking about the article made me reluctant to start it. It had to be perfect. I wanted you to walk away feeling profoundly changed by the time you're done reading. But you see, that's the flaw. The insurmountable mirage

of perfectionism. The mountain of work that I must scale to be able to yield the results that I want is just not worth it. I'll plant my foot firmly on the lowest ledge, which is already humbling, but then there's the risk of failing. Oh, to fail. To not be perfect on the first try. Everyone already knows that the fear is worse than the actual failure, but when the blood simmers beneath your skin from embarrassment, every quote about facing fear dissolves from memory. If I try, I have to get up when I fail, even if my palms sting. Waiting for that bizarre spurt of motivation at 3 AM will never prepare me for the strain my muscles will have to go through, or the demoralization of not getting what I want. Going into it that way was bound to set me up for failure, and of course it goes deeper than that. I live in a way that prevents success. I stay up all night to watch TV and online shop, I let my work accumulate, and I eat like garbage. They are kinda all my fault. The days and nights blur, and I'm only motivated when the sun edges on the horizon, which is too late to get anything done.

"I WANTED YOU TO WALK AWAY FEELING PROFOUNDLY CHANGED BY THE TIME YOU'RE DONE READING. BUT YOU SEE, THAT'S THE FLAW. THE INSURMOUNTABLE MIRAGE OF PERFECTIONISM."

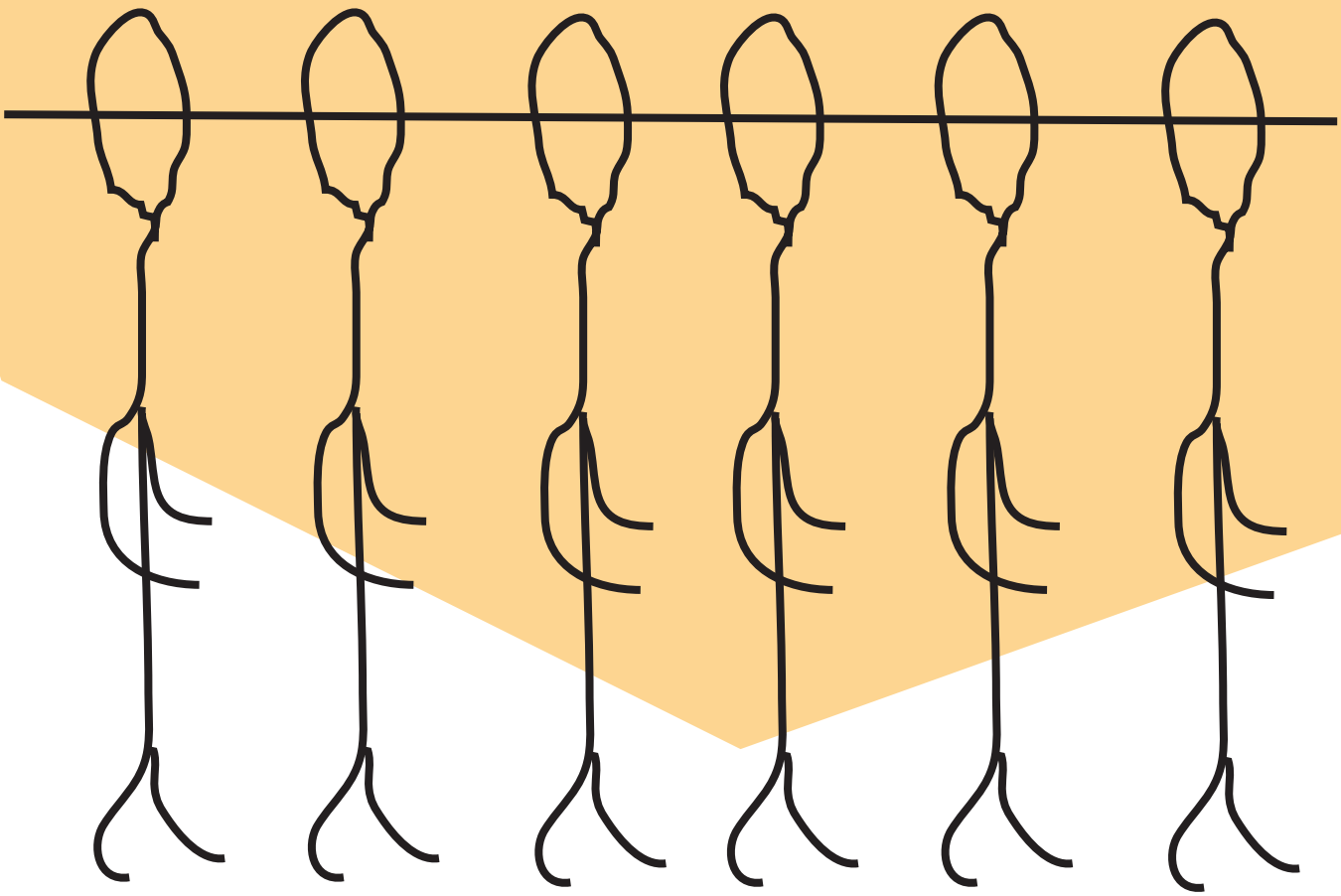
Irregularity and hedonism are the easiest culprits to tackle. My dad goes to sleep at 10 PM, latest, each night, and he wakes up around 3 AM to make phone calls overseas and pray. We run into each other when I'm banging around in the kitchen, or if I'm doing my homework in the middle of the night because good old procrastination. "Go to sleep," he always urges me, "you can finish this all in the morning. You need to be awake during the day, not at night!" I always nod, and sometimes I oblige. But he's right. The morning in my world is just loud birds chirping, back aches, and headaches from insufficient sleep, but that's my own doing. The day is actually longer when you sleep less, and if you go to sleep earlier, say seven to nine hours before you expect to wake up, you wake up feeling well rested. Wild. I don't need to pull up any scientific journals to defend the importance of a steady circadian rhythm, and that applies to food too. I still eat a breakfast-lunch-dinner hybrid once a day at 5 PM on my busy days, which I know is bad, but at least I try to resist the temptation of the vending machines and pack some fruit. The same has to apply to managing my daylight hours. I'll add YouTube videos to my watch queue instead of watching right there and then, and I break my to-do list off into innocuous, almost negligible, tasks. I brainstorm, furiously writing notes on my phone or agenda. Baby steps. Real life is less about perfectionism and more about accumulation of progress, whether you can feel and see it or not, and self-forgiveness does more for me than smoothies.

I cringe at the possibility of sounding like a health guru, but the fact is, we need to treat healthy habits seriously. The competition to be America's Next Unhealthiest and Most Overworked Model is apparent the second you talk to any friend group of college students. "I had two papers due, an exam, and mad homework. I haven't slept in two days!" The testimonials are more enthusiastic than HSN sales reps'. Of course, it becomes fodder for memes, and the commiseration party is one that rages hard.

The thing about healthy habits isn't just that they're hard to form. Yes, we struggle to sacrifice the short term pleasure for our betterment, and, God, it's hard to wake up before 10 AM without feeling like you've been run over by a truck, but by now you probably know where you kill your opportunities before they can grow into realities. Of course, it's not as easy as meditating every morning and every night and going off for yoga retreats. The point is to start small and to value yourself. To hold yourself higher than the relaxation, the failure, and the discomfort. Soren Kierkegaard says, "Do it or don't do it– you will regret both." I say, with my entire chest, no regrets. Let's get this bread.

creatures of habit

by cassandra rosario
art by faith franzonia



While there are differences between habit and routine, I cannot help but equate notions that we are creatures of habit to a strict adherence to routine. From our earliest days, we have been creatures of habit — individuals bound by specific and individualized routines. Whether it be putting your clothes on in a particular order or writing with a certain hand, humans have proven themselves to be attached to habits and routines.

"WHILE ROUTINE CAN BE COMFORTING AND FEEL SAFE, THIS COMFORTABILITY DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE DO NOT WANT MORE OUT OF OUR LIVES."

As one enters college, the need for the habitual is ever prominent. When you think of your daily routine, I can almost guarantee that you typically eat around the same times every day or leave for class at a specific time. You probably even see the same groupings of people as you enter Murray Hall or leave Brower. Even if these habits are not married to conscious needs and desires, they remain prevalent in everyday life. Thus, although you may not want to be grouped as a creature of habit, you most likely are.

However, you are not alone in this habituality. Studies have shown that human development occurs during the first 18-20 years of life. Throughout this period, routine is ingrained into our very beings. We are taught that routine is good; it's practical and allows us to develop into mature and responsible young adults. Routine has become such a pivotal part of our society that one could receive negative backlash upon breaking it. Close friends and family may assume that something is seriously wrong in your life or you are going through a transition or some form of change.

Perhaps, this is exactly why so many people crave spontaneity. Although we are creatures of habit, this does not denote how we feel about the concept and how it impacts our everyday lives. While routine can be comforting and feel safe, this comfortability does not mean that we do not want more out of our lives. I cannot think of the amount of times I have wanted to drop everything and do something seemingly out of the ordinary like packing up all of my things and getting on the next flight to Greece. Although many people crave spontaneity and change, very few people have the means to feed these desires.

Thus, many individuals have proven that we maintain a sacred bond with habit. Even when we successfully break one habit, we still have at least another 10 that we will never break. This only furthers notions that routines and habits are rather difficult to break. However, this may not necessarily be a negative. In fact, this may be the beauty of this relationship. Breaking habits gives us some form of control over our lives. It shows that we had the power to enact change, a concept that so many people fear. It can prove one's strength, resilience, or adaptability. However, maintaining certain habits is also a positive. It gives us some level of comfort and ease knowing that certain aspects of our lives will never change. In turn, being creatures of habits can give us insight into who we are as individuals and what we truly value out of our lives.

check to check

by zachary kauz

By design, an Instagram profile is an invitation;

an admission into one's personally curated gallery, a shrine to a self-devised lifestyle. Static window panels offer glimpses into the individual's definition of grandeur. Stills of your best life validated by heart reacts, embroidered with a winningly ambiguous caption. It's intoxicating, vacation without travel, glamour without effort. It's endless, depicted by millions of profiles each with their own interpretation of life's greatest exploits. The prospect of a self-designed model portfolio is afforded to any user, only surpassed by the ability to lose yourself in the realities others have assembled.

An extension of social media at large, Instagram has reorganized the parameters surrounding persona. Broadcast is egalitarian, displaced from the elitism of celebrity, a baseline level of power is distributed worldwide. Moment to moment, we can all tap into urges to maintain a permanent legacy, earned through our mere existence. To our immediate peers, we can all be famous for being famous. And above all, we may browse. Every personal brand occupying the same platform, instant gratification as far as the eyes can see. The chronic social media user may just be the more economically attuned shopaholic, and Instagram is window shopping minus commitment. Separate from the burden of commerce exchange, ambling across an endless storefront offers few palpable drawbacks. Moments present themselves to be observed and no more. Posts only provoke implicit investment, for the time being the advertisement has become the product. Any single post is a locative mark, etched into a timeline, pinning a time and context to your personal trajectory. The forward propulsion from one life goal to the next, broadcasted outward and furiously studied by other would be influencers.

An unspoken competition exists, for relentless prolificity which saturates perceptions with your achievements. The urge to be seen, the urge for how seen you are to tower over you; incremental validation ticks upward, limitless in reach before the next moment surpasses it. A scrapbook of your own accomplishments spills into the books of others, allocating your moments and everyone else's to the same pile.

It's an unrelenting celebration, of yourself and of others, of outrage and infatuation, and it's always an open invitation.

america's growing addiction to absolutism

by brielle diskin

"WE LABEL THESE MOMENTS IN HISTORY BECAUSE WE YEARN TO BE A PART OF SOMETHING... TO BE ABLE TO SAY, 'I WAS THERE FOR THAT.'"

-ADAM YAWDOSZYN

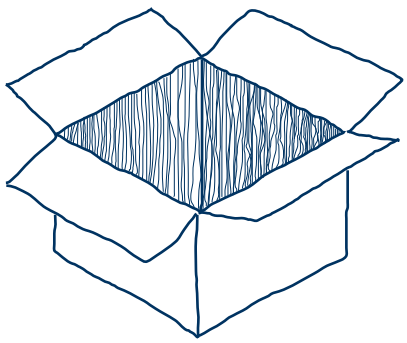
We are living in a country —in a world— that is obsessed with absolutes while being entirely and dangerously unaware of it.

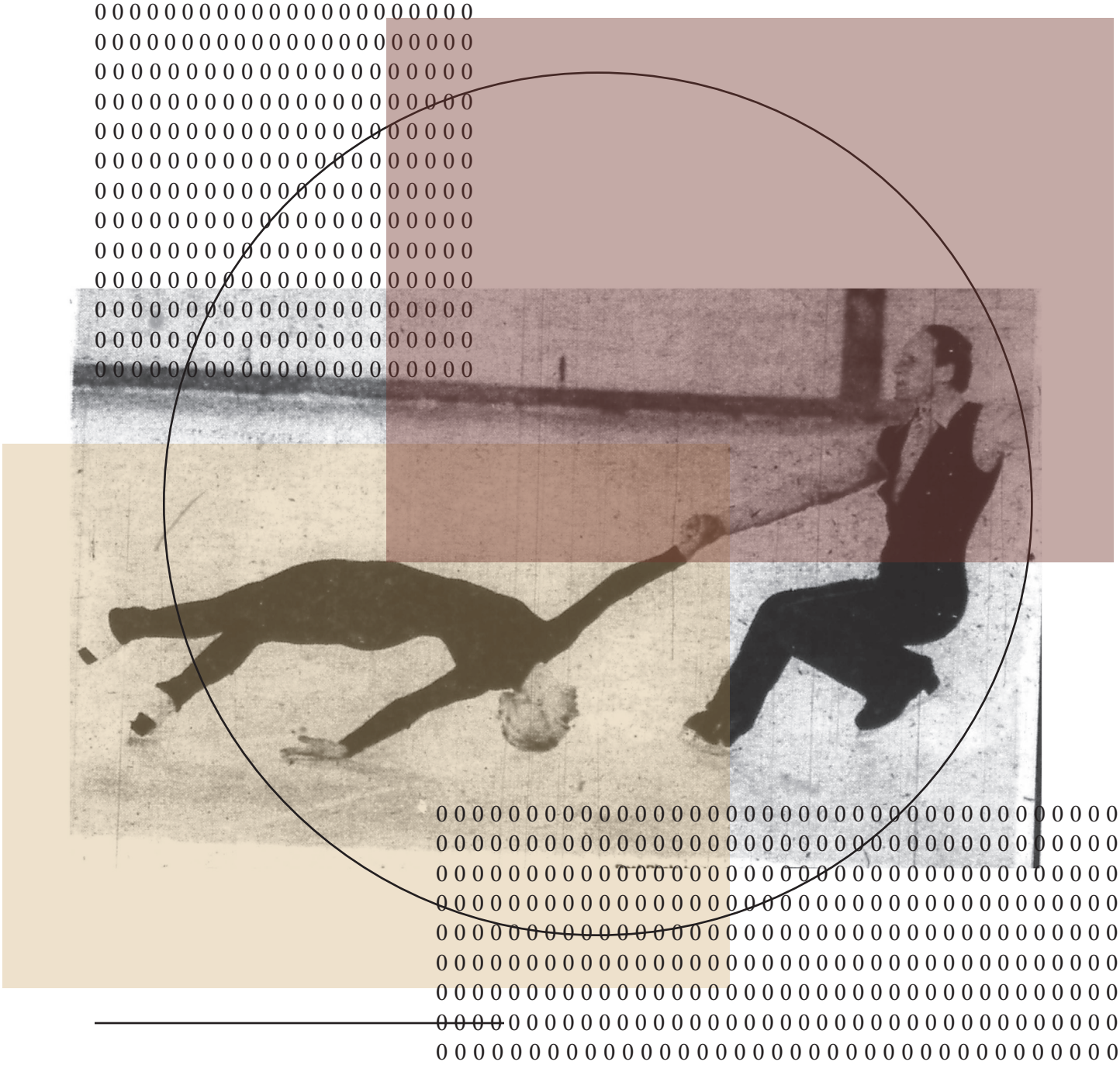
Everything is either black or white with zero shades of grey. We have a two party political landscape with an absence of partisanship. We are in a #MeToo era that cuts even seemingly minor infractions off at the knees. Time's up, you're out in this "cancel culture." An occultish greek system is dominating college campuses and putting people behind letters and labels. Meanwhile, millennials both use and loath labels. America is consumed in countless wars on inanimate objects spanning decades (i.e. The War on Terror or The War on Drugs to name a couple). Everyone seems to suffer from a mental condition categorized by acronyms, but if they ever show any signs they'll be condemned as "crazy."

Extremism does not work on either end of anything. You can't confront societal issues by treating the symptoms and ignoring the disease. Take #MeToo for example. Calling "dunzo" on every man who's ever made a woman feel uncomfortable doesn't do much to solve the real problem. The real problem being, we're not raising men right. We're not instilling in them respect for women. What we are doing is ingraining in them toxic ideas about masculinity and teaching them to suppress their emotions. Where is the room for learning from our mistakes? Progress happens when we acknowledge the problem.

A culture that condemns, overwhelmingly so, disservices its original, maybe good, intentions. We're treating the symptoms and not the disease. The more we put individuals in boxes, the less likely we are able to collectively break out of them.

We exist in moments of absolutism. People are described by the cultures they exist in, the movements they've witnessed. Every era and all its people get a title as we habitually associate life with labels.





music

visions of im precision

by zachary kauz

Perhaps the tyrant rule of time signatures is little more than a necessary evil. Trained musicians develop rhythmic instinct through no fault of their own. Understanding where the beat should be present is the foundation of learning music, in no small part because of the human brain's craven need for patterns. Music is repetition's magnum opus. A means for series' of notes to meet our brains halfway and win our desire. Its presentation is impossibly agreeable, but should it settle for our demands?

MF DOOM, Alice Coltrane, Herbie Mann and Blueface enter a jam session. In isolated moments, it is perhaps imperceptible by any listener, themselves included. "The beat" becomes its own timeline occurring three days behind the rest of time, with our four performers in charge of how we interpret rhythm. It sprawls out in abstract form, and time becomes a vague guideline instead of an established rule. It's confusing and slightly alienating, but wholly intriguing. For trained musicians, the ability to perform out-of-time coherently is an astonishing feat. For those who just ambled their way into the practice, it still makes for a fascinating listen.

Blueface's delivery is not unprecedented, specifically not within his own coast. West coast titans E-40 and Eazy-E expressed a uniquely relaxed attitude to their deliveries, riding the beat but not quite holding on for dear life. They were personalities as much as workmen, but they were above all compelling rappers. There's an understandable chance that Blueface's professed disinterest in rapping on-beat will horrify hip-hop fanatics, but even though his technical ability sits on the polar opposite end of Busta Rhymes', there's shared enthusiasm and experimentation in both approaches. It's exciting whether it's a product of untapped potential or veteran skill.

In an age where information fires so rapidly towards us, painting in such broad strokes is an asset. Compounding Blueface's staunch refusal to rap conventionally is an adherence to song lengths that rarely cross the three minute mark. The ability to leave audiences wanting more when we have so much at our fingertips is more coveted than ever before. My own compulsive listening to six Valee songs in 14 minutes or 15 Earl Sweatshirt songs in 24 minutes achieves this. Though major label pop and hip-hop projects get longer and longer, a counter-movement of making every second count seems to be cropping up more and more extensively. Only an additional paradox allows artistry to stoke our demand when stimulation engulfs us, the act of playing with time and valuing it all at once.

it's a london thing

by benjamin brizuela

Have you ever wondered who some of the key players are in the Grime or UK Rap world? Grime has been around since the late 90's and it has promoted a different sound to the rap world. Grime is "hair raising", "dirty" and is equipped with raw sounds. I think that the main difference between Grime and U.S. rap is that you could feel the "garage" beat and hear the intonation in the MC's voice. Let's take a look at some of the key MCs that pushed Grime into what it is today.

skepta:

A legend from the early days of Grime, he was responsible for the first Grime beat when it as established as Grime. Skepta was affiliated with Meridian Crew and started Boy Better Know, a collective. Crews would all spit at a pirate radio, taking turns and seeing who had the most fire in their verses. Around 2006, Grime was still underground. Skepta was frustrated, as he had reached a pinacle in the scene, and he wondered where Grime could take him next. He searched for a new sound that would make him more mainstream. In an interview with Peter Rosenberg, Skepta said, "I made music primarily to become popular in the United States." Skepta made a record named "Rolex Sweep" (2009). Obviously this song did well, but he was not proud of this record. He was still itching for something more authentic to his personality and sound. Soon after, a song called "German Whip" (2014) was made by Meridian Dan and JME, Skepta's brother, and it single-handedly brought back Grime. "German Whip" made Skepta feel hopeful for Grime's future and ultimately pushed his performance. It even inspired him to make "That's Not Me" (2014) a few months after "German Whip's" release. If you hear this song, you can feel that Skepta's pissed off, ready to rip off on the mic. He felt that he needed that image of him being a pop star to be put in the past. This song allowed him to start anew and grind hard. Skepta's evolution shows how Grime's primary emotion is anger. The tonality of Skepta's voice, his physical action of delivery through bars, and the way he says "It's the return of the Mac" all signal that he's back and he's ready to reveal a new side of Grime with the hard hitting bass, and an instrumental accented with sounds like a manipulated sample from an old school brick phones spread an eccentric sound.

wiley:

During the same time as So Solid Crew, Wiley was looking for his own sound in a crew called the Pay as You Go Cartel. His song "Champagne Dance" (2001) was a huge hit. Garage, or electronic dance music, was becoming played out and unlistenable, so Wiley wanted something different for Grime, and so did other MC's. After spending some time in the lab, he developed what he called "Eski" beats, referring to Eskimos, as his beats and style were so cold. He wanted something darker, faster and aggressive. The darkness and harshness of "Eski" and current Grime beats embody the difficulties of growing up in notorious counsel estates (UK projects/Public housing). These places were filled with violence, drugs, and gang activity. Generally, people living in these conditions were neglected by Parliament such as Meridian Walk (Skepta's territory), Bow E3, and Tower Hamlets, three areas where Grime MC's were from. His song "Wot Do You Call It" (2004) was powerful, starting with a conversation: "What should we call this? What do you call it...Garage...Urban...Two Step," representing the early days of finding an identity for this sound.

new faces of grime:

There was a period in time where Grime wasn't prominent, but kids in the same living standards of their idols decided to put up videos of them spitting bars, or ciphers. Ciphers would be held in local clubs, pirate radio stations, internet radios, and even on YouTube. When their old school idols began making records again, the youth felt that Grime wasn't over. They believed that they could still make it. It was their dream to make music they loved and to be around the people that they grew up listening to. For instance, on YouTube there were times where the old and new generation were ciphering at the same venue or place. By digitizing Grime, accessibility spread to fans. They continue to carry the old school spirit through passion and explosiveness.

old dog, same tricks

by zachary kauz

illustration by dan caldwell

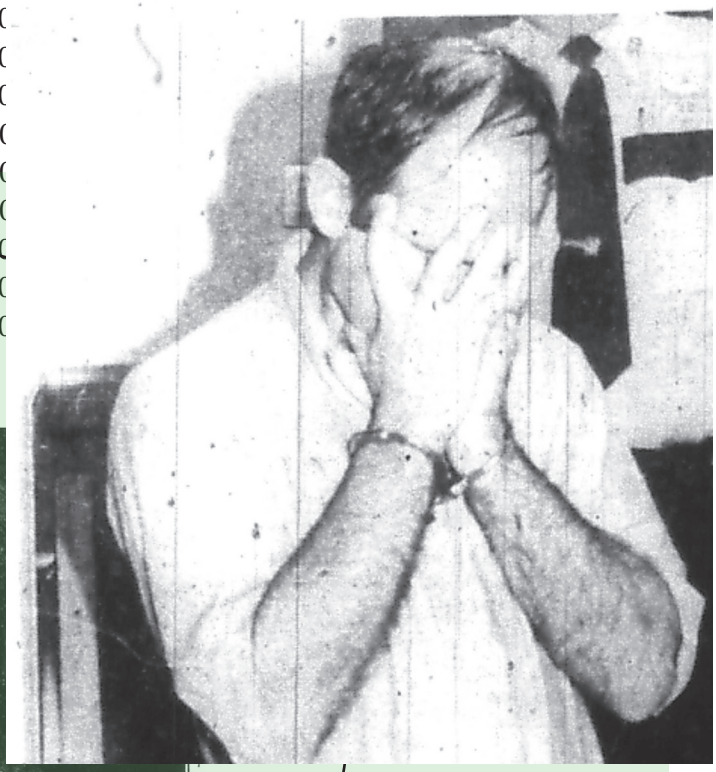
If there's a case to be made for putting all your eggs in multiple baskets, but dropping said baskets anyway, it appears in the form of Pitbull. He began his multifaceted career as a Lil Jon acolyte, a Floridian underdog making relatively clean cut Crunk music while flowing like a member of 2 Live Crew (the shared Miami origin is important). It was a shrewd artistic decision, specifically during a return of Southern hip-hop entirely oriented around being boisterous party fodder as well as the increasing attention cast towards reggaeton in America. Pitbull pilfered from both sounds at once, but remained an unavoidable figure of pop music long after the genres he ascended with were marginalized.

What ensued was a masterful rebrand, raising the bar for the art of "selling out", keeping Pitbull a persistent presence in pop culture to this day, even as less-and-less people understand why. Pitbull was always a bit of an outlier in the conventional hip-hop landscape. His music was agreeable and widely appealing, two characteristics he would focus in on across his discography. No matter what, Pitbull remained a one-man Chuck E Cheese birthday party, at his friskiest an age-appropriate wedding MC who spoke of lust in broad strokes and always infallibly just wanted to have a good time.

Many Americans were not having a good time circa 2009, when the newly cleaned-up Pitbull returned to the spotlight. They were largely pining for better times, times often relegated to the past. One of Pitbull's calling cards, prevalent across the entirety of his post-2009 discography, is the blatant sampling of older, renowned, or at least remembered, pop music. Sampling is the foundation of much of hip-hop culture. Much of Pitbull's music, in fact, presents itself like a DJ set. Directly comparable to his sunny pop rap peer Flo Rida, the sample elevates Pitbull the performer, rather than Pitbull affecting the sample.

Sacrilegious to the act of songwriting? Lazy and self-serving? Sheds doubt on whether Pitbull needs to be present in the first place? The answer to each is largely yes, but it asserted Mr. Worldwide as a worldwide popstar. Years and years were endured of Pitbull songs slotting themselves into commercials, school functions, increasingly insular radio stations, a nonstop curation of pop music's past, fronted by a roller rink DJ displaced to the spotlight and given a classy suit collection.

Even while titling albums after the coming apocalypse (Climate Change and Global Warming), Pitbull maintained unwavering high hopes. An impassioned performance at a Walmart sponsored event in Kodiak, Alaska would be the perfect metaphor for Pitbull's endless enthusiasm, if it didn't actually happen. Much of the surrounding world, however, has grown callous to Pitbull's Sunny-D salesman personality. Hip-hop perceived as more authentic has stormed the charts; he composed the soundtrack for Gotti, a film with an aggregate critic score of a 24; his immediately infamous cover of Toto's Africa currently has a like-to-dislike ratio of 1-to-4 on YouTube. Yet, this probably isn't the last time we'll hear from Pitbull. Maybe that will take the world's end.



potpourri

FILM PHOTOGRAPHY

by benjamin brizuela

Photography has become as simple as taking our phones out of a back pocket and mindlessly photographing what we're eating, wearing, or seeing in the street. We aren't as conscious of what we are taking, let alone the thousands of photos we look at daily, and how these both affect us. Film photography is an active way of seeing the world, it allows for intention and purpose to go into what we are choosing to save for later. They may seem complicated and outdated, but once you understand how they operate and you get comfortable, you may develop an appreciation towards film and what it has to offer outside of the "cool look."

"It's real, you can feel the vibrations within the machine, the recoil and the next sheet of film continue as you progress the lever."

Many people are going back to film because it is a physical and intentional process. I would compare it to the physical aspect that is required of putting on a vinyl record, typing with a typewriter, or reading a bound book. Many cherish the 'ritual' of it and the same goes for shooting film. You buy a roll of film, you insert that film in the camera and then you wind the lever back, preparing for the first shot. For me, everytime I hear that crisp trigger and shutter, the actions feel more authentic, more important, than taking a photo with my phone, or even a digital camera. It's real, you can feel the vibrations within the machine, the recoil and the next sheet of film continue as you progress the lever.

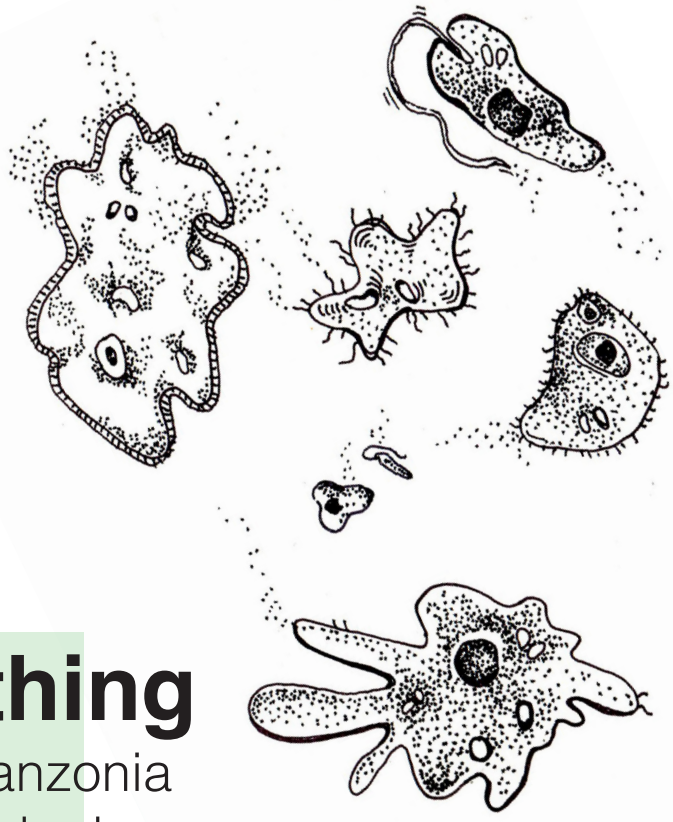
Before you take that shot, you have to ensure all of your settings are correct. Make sure that your aperture and ISO are set accordingly and that the correct F-stop is chosen. The necessitated waiting period for each roll of film to be developed and scanned also adds to this ritualistic process. I admire film because it teaches you patience and curiosity. It may not be instant, and definitely takes a while to master, but it teaches you how to pause, breathe, and become conscious of each photo you're taking.

Pink

bitter lemon

by angel ogoemesim
illustration by keza ruranga

You have learned how to chew your words before you speak them. You think you enjoy this, this senseless thing. You have spent hours unlearning the sweetness of your tongue, trading sweet for sour, trading a smooth swallow for a harsh crunching of words. I like it, you tell yourself, although the sweet has long left your mouth and all that remains is that bitter tastes that stains the back of your throat. Sometimes you still cough, trying to release that stale taste from your mouth, but it has been too long for you to remember how to find sweetness again. You continue to blame it on what needed to be done, what else were you supposed to do? Die? You opened your mouth wide for spoonfuls of bitter lemon meant to cleanse your mouth of the old you until with each large bite you learned how to sound like them, how to speak like them, how to talk like them, how to walk like them, how to be everything but them. You found a home in a home that will never be yours, opened the cracked red door and found a tight, aged room full of nothing but a splintered white chair and decayed wood that dug into the soles of your feet; you tried to make this home your home although what you have always known of home was once found sitting in the softness of the Earth. This needed to happen, why can you not understand that? This was for the best, for what more were you than a mere corpse one breathless cry away from becoming the sweet spot of the Earth again? Malnourished and dying, you were said to be, even though your belly was once full of bits of coconut your mother would bring you, hands raw from hours of hacking away at this hard fruit. Oh, how foolish of you to think that coconut could swell a belly to the size of yours. You'll look back and smile at the memory of you being plucked from the Earth by white hands like the wilting flower you believed you were, the same white hands that killed your mother and fed you spoonfuls of sour to make you forget, to make you believe that your country was already dying before they came. You smile now, still convincing yourself that there is sweetness in this new tongue. You will scream and shout in this new language that this new tongue has brought you more things than you could ever have imagined. But you fail to realize the deal you have made with this sour bitter devil, the same one that rots your mouth, leaving decayed blackened teeth and the smell of death behind despite the newness of this mouth. Perhaps the bitter you still taste is the blood of your country reminding you of its death in this new you. The you that has been taught to believe that your people were, collectively, a wrong, vicious, evil creature, stalking the Earth for blood of fresh and old, consuming everything that it could. Maybe one day you will no longer consume this bitter, no longer spend hours chewing your words and spitting out the ones to be forgotten, no longer convince yourself that this is right — that this is what sweetness is. Maybe someday you'll brush your teeth, removing the coated bitter and rotted teeth, form this toothless mouth around the sweetness of old words. But for now, you remain in that cracking white chair behind that red door in that tight and aged room in a home that will never be your home. You feed yourself spoonfuls of sour, although no one is forcing bitter lemon down your throat anymore.



little thing

by faith franzonia
illustration by keza ruranga

this little thing was without want. nothing wanted it, nor did it want anything. it liked being like this, anything more would have made it more than a little thing. its only motion was a slow frothy sway from one side to the other. its favorite time of day was the early morning, before the sun drug itself out of a pool of darkness. on most mornings it woke up to take a seat in the cool dew of fresh grass, sedated by the sensation. it didn't mind sitting in the wet, for little things aren't concerned with temporal inconveniences. they let themselves be. it allowed itself to feel the same things and new things, and kept to these two actions. you could call this the sway. this little thing didn't know much about the world as it preferred a simple, naive life. the birds' songs sounded all the sweeter and the hum of the cicadas was doubly intoxicating. but it didn't know that, it didn't know anything. how would it possibly know that? how would it possibly know anything? this little thing was without want. nothing wanted it, nor did it want anything. it liked being like this, anything more would have made it more than a little thing.

poetry collective

Our Choice to Be
Husein AbuAlhuda

Beautiful Blue Shell,
Glistening solely among
These many grains of sand,

It was not nature's intention
To make you in this way,
Yet here you are,

Beautiful Blue Thief-
You stole the color from the sky,
And the doubt from my mind,

Are you content in the sand-
Do you find comfort
In the fingers of the teasing ocean?

Why do you not allow
For the loving sea
To carry you away?

Are you afraid
Of losing yourself,
Among its beautiful blue waves,

Or have you found peace
In knowing you are alone,
Among these many grains of sand?

Untitled
Aneree Rathod

There is something gorgeous to be said
About a night spent by the river
About a poem spoken
But never composed
A mallard rising from the water's browse

It feels like a prayer
To shadow streetlamps after hours
And spill their yellow with a simple song.

Yes, on a night like this, one can only watch
Slowly, silently, loudly
Understanding all at once
Only to surrender.
After all, where is the pleasure in conclusion;
The sincerity in narrative?

I say, onwards.

Find that you have been vanishing
For a long time,
Travelling with only questions
Into something greater.

Untitled
Aneree Rathod

I chase the sun
And flatten it over my body with more than a poem.
Happiness is so simple, unprocessed.

It Only Rained Around Us
Zachary Kauz

I first learned to swim in the pouring rain
Tumbling from gutters
Pooled into overflowing cities

We flowed out of downcast subways
Bathed in clutter and sunlight
Refracting the radiance of billboards

The tides of bodies in motion
Poured across the pavement
Wading in our own selfish directions

Against the Earth's control

Still
Faith Franzonia

Stand tall,
calmly watch the approaching dark, wet mass.

Stillness is the ability to move when still,
and to be still when moving.

Squint your eyes at the hot sun,

Silently know
there is nothing more

than this.

I Saw a Seagull in the Rain
Robert Rackmil

somehow alone
twisting in the gray.
bones sand,

now salt on the wind

Found
Faith Franzonia

It can not always be found in the lone word,
but in the space after a word.

In the stutter that pushes a stack of words out.
See how they clumsily clatter onto the kitchen tile.

Look behind the word,
In front of the word.

Try ripping the word in half,
Look at how the sun shines through it.

Does the word resist hearing itself?
Or does it intrude mid-conversation?

Can you hear it climbing on the roof of the party?
Or is it half of a whisper in an empty hall?

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